114 Freya Stark, who is always interesting and whose descriptions of native life and architecture are fascinating and picturesque. But even this intrepid traveller is inclined to stress the poetical side of her experiences, and to leave out the realities of smell and dirt. For dirty and smelly Arabia is.

364 The villages have no drainage or sanitation; garbage and offal are thrown on a heap outside the houses, or on the sea-shore, there to be removed in time by those voracious scavengers, the vultures and kites. It is a common experience to see the carcases of donkeys and other livestock lying on the shore, swollen and covered with flies, decaying under the hot sun. The stench within half a mile of an Arab village is simply appalling; one would be truthful if unkind to describe the Arab as having no prejudices against filth.

515 In their persons the lower classes are extremely dirty by European standards, although they can scarcely be blamed for not taking baths, since water invariably has to be carried for several miles from the wells on the backs of donkeys and is, consequently, expensive. The Arab workers are very poorly paid, and prefer to spend their small earnings on food for their families, and the rare luxuries in which they indulge. The current belief that the Arabs 'wash' themselves in the sand is an anomaly. According to the [183] Koran they are supposed to carry out a certain number of ablutions during the year, especially during the fast of Ramadan and the anniversary of the Prophet's death. As water is scarce, they obey the Holy Book by making a token ablution with sand. Anyone familiar with the grimy grey sand one finds in the vicinity of a village will realize that, used as a 'cleansing' agent, it probably [184] contributes to the sores and skin infections from which so many of them suffer.

136 Another serious cause of infection are the flies, which breed in that climate on a scale to be observed nowhere else in the world. I have seen a plate of fresh dates carried a few yards from one room to another across an open courtyard. By the time it reached the second room it would be covered with a mass of flies at least two inches deep. Incredible to the insect-free European, this must be [264] seen to be believed. Yet the Arab would not think of cleansing food that had been thus contaminated. He nonchalantly sweeps away the flies with his sleeve and proceeds to masticate the polluted mess with relish.

136 Apart from the piles of offal and refuse which are a feature of 366 every village, another inducement to flies are the windowless shops

in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

chalcedony stone with a faded inscription, and had taken it to the silversmith to have it made into a ring; the purpose of his visit was to collect and pay for it, not always a simple matter in Arabia, where the merchant normally demands twice the legitimate price and expects to be beaten down.

Mahmud, who is a Baluchi and lives with his family in the poorer part of the town, took us through the less salubrious quarter. Sharjah has no city wall proper, but its place is taken by a ring of filthy hovels, the palm-thatched barousti huts of the coolies, slaves and servants. The stench from these slums is unbearable in hot weather, for each hut dweller uses his front door as a cesspool and a refuse dump, and the place is infested with flies and insects; native children crawl about in the sand, and mangy pai dogs snarl at one's approach. These miserable hovels afford protection against neither sun nor rain, and it is remarkable that their poverty-stricken inhabitants are not afflicted with disease. The quarter is a disgrace to Sharjah town and, although the Political Officer has remonstrated with the sheikh about it, he refuses to have the place rebuilt.

It was a pleasant relief to pass into the cool, dim alleys leading to the town; many of them are roofed with palm-thatch and are comparatively clean. The walls are honeycombed with doorways, leading to the houses of the tradesmen and metalsmiths. After a walk of fifteen minutes through the maze of dark, winding streets, during the progress of which we were conscious of hundreds of dark eyes staring curiously at us, we reached the sugar market. This is a large square in the centre of the town; it is roofed-in with huge strips of palm-matting, supported by whitewashed wooden pillars, making it very dim inside.

Tethered to the pillars were six camels, snarling and grumbling; occasionally they tried to rise, but their forefeet were tied together and they would hobble for a few yards and quickly fall back on their knees. They had brought bags of sugar from a boat in the harbour, and their owners were arguing over prices with the brokers. The market, which is about six hundred feet square, contains warehouses, brokers' offices and shops on each side. We should have liked to take a photograph of it, but as Sparkes had no time-exposure on his camera he decided not to risk wasting his film.

The colour and variety of dress one sees in a native bazaar is remarkable. The women are the least attractive, their trousers, wraps and veils being of an unrelieved black; it is their menfolk